

WHAT I CLAIM IS:

1. A method of warning a following vehicle when a vehicle in front, a leading vehicle, applies its brakes, including the steps of:

5 causing at least one brake light of said leading vehicle to illuminate during a braking process, as a braking value of said braking process increases, in conformity with a present value of said braking value;

10 causing illumination to last for a retention time that is a function of said braking process in conformity with a maximum value of said braking value after said braking value drops below said maximum value; and

causing said illumination to fade, after conclusion of said retention time, during a period of time that is a function of said braking process.

15 2. A method according to claim 1, wherein said braking value is provided by deceleration of said vehicle.

3. A method according to claim 1, wherein said at least one brake light illuminates upon activation of an ABS system in conformity with a predetermined braking value.

20 4. A method according to claim 1, wherein said retention time is provided by the duration between the end of said maximum braking value and the point in time at which said braking value drops to a predetermined fraction of said maximum value.

5 5. A method according to claim 1, wherein a speed of said leading vehicle is detected at the beginning of a braking process, and duration of said fading is a function of said vehicle speed at the beginning of said braking process.

5 6. A method according to claim 1, wherein a speed of said leading vehicle is detected at the beginning of a braking process, and illumination of said at least one brake light is a function of said vehicle speed at the beginning of said braking process.

10 7. A method according to claim 1, wherein a duration of said fading is a function of the duration during which the braking process is effected in conformity with said maximum braking value.

8. An apparatus for warning a following vehicle when a vehicle in front, a leading vehicle, applies its brakes, comprising:

15 for said leading vehicle, at least one brake light having a variable signal pattern;

 a control device having a computer; and

 means for conveying to said control device at least one present braking value that characterizes a braking process, wherein said computer calculates a control value such that said at least one
20 brake light is caused to illuminate during a braking process, as the braking value of said braking process increases, in conformity with said present braking value, wherein illumination lasts for a retention time that is a function of said braking process in conformity with a maximum

value of said braking value after said braking value drops below said maximum value, and wherein said illumination fades, after conclusion of said retention time, during a period of time that is a function of said braking process.

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9. An apparatus according to claim 8, wherein during duration of said fading the control value that determines said fading is compared with a control value that corresponds to an illumination of said at least one brake light in conformity with the respective present braking value, and wherein said present braking value is taken as a new maximum braking value if the control value that determines the fading is the same or less than the value that corresponds to the present braking value.

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